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UNH MBA Students' Mission: To Promote The International Space Station

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DURHAM, N.H. – Space may be considered the final frontier, but to a group of MBA students at the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, it's a chance to work on a strategy and marketing plan that's out of this world.

A four-person team of UNH students has been named a finalist in the 2004 NASA Means Business Student Competition, a national competition sponsored by NASA to develop a plan to promote awareness and stimulate interest in the International Space Station. Only five schools made the final cut, with UNH the only university representing the greater New England area. The other finalists are from Georgia, Arizona and Texas.

The mission: to identify a target audience, develop a strategy and design a promotion plan for the International Space Station that explains what it will accomplish and how it is important to everyday life. The students have been charged with finding a way to promote the space station's role as a bridge to Mars, technology development, research opportunities, international cooperation and future exploration to today's young people ages 14 to 18 around the world

The winning team will be judged on its plan, which will include two video public service announcements, a Web site, Internet e-learning exercises and an outreach program that NASA anticipates using. UNH will present to top NASA officials and staff, contractors, and subcontractors at the competition May 18-20, 2004, at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. Winners will be announced at that competition.

According to Ashok Devata, a second-year MBA student overseeing concept design and development for the project, the students were searching for a challenging activity outside of their academic work when they found the NASA competition on the Internet. They chose it specifically because they all were enthused about NASA and the space program. Devata's teammates are first-year MBA students Sudhir Mulpuru (team leader), David Regan and Ann Larsen.

The competition helps the students apply their knowledge of management and the business world and its tools of strategic planning and analysis, opportunity-based marketing and product development, advertising and promotion, communication and journalism.

"We were able to use the lessons we learned in our marketing and strategy courses in terms of developing a strategic plan for NASA. While we have developed a very creative storyboard for

the two PSAs, our approach was highly supported by the marketing information we developed from the research we did about demographics and target audience for this marketing plan. It is always good to try the skills we learn in academics in the real world and see how it works,” Devata said.

In addition, the UNH team has partnered with key scientists, engineers and administrators in NASA and/or the aerospace industry and Whittemore School faculty who are acting as information sources and mentors.

“Developing a comprehensive strategic positioning, promotional plan and outreach program is a challenge to any large business, but trying to construct one for something as grand as the International Space Station presents a true test of academic knowledge, creativity and business know-how. These students are gaining real-world experience working as a team to convey to the world’s young people, our future leaders, the significance of this multibillion dollar, international project,” said Michael Merenda, chair of the Department of Management at the Whittemore School of Business and Economics, and the faculty sponsor for the team.